

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 /075 W
-----089749 310321Z /62

R 301333Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4643
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 1503

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, KE
SUBJ: TWO CABINET MINISTERS EXCHANGE JOBS

REF: 77 NAIROBI 16495

1. IN FIRST CABINET-LEVEL CHANGE SINCE EARLY 1976, MINISTERS ISAAC OMOLO OKERO AND DANIEL MUTINDA HAVE EXCHANGED PORTFOLIOS. OMOLO OKERO BECOMES MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, AND MUTINDA BECOMES MINISTER FOR POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS. STATE HOUSE ANNOUNCEMENT JANUARY 26 BILLED CHANGE AS MINOR RESHUFFLING, AND INITIAL LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS DOWNPLAYED ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

2. COMMENT: FACT IS, HOWEVER, THAT THESE KINDS OF CHANGES HAVE BEEN RARE IN RECENT YEARS IN KENYA. THEY ARE NOT MADE WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION SATISFACTORY TO PRESIDENT KENYATTA, AND OFTEN HAVE POLITICAL MEANING IN TERMS OF JOCKEYING FOR POSITION PRIOR TO SUCCESSION. IN THIS CASE, RESHUFFLING CAME AS SURPRISE, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO PINPOINT WITH CERTAINTY WHAT LAY BEHIND IT. ACCORDING TO DEPUTY PERM SEC IN MINISTRY OF POWER AND
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COMMUNICATIONS OMOLO OKERO LEARNED OF CHANGE IN PHONE CALL ONLY MINUTES BEFORE IT WAS ANNOUNCED ON RADIO.

3. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT SWITCH REPRESENTS DEMOTION FOR OMOLO OKERO, WHO HAS, IN GENERAL, BEEN HIGHLY RESPECTED MEMBER OF CABINET. POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS IS NOW ONE OF MOST SIGNIFICANT MINISTRIES WITH RESPONSIBILITIES INTER ALIA

FOR KENYA AIRWAYS, KENYA RAILWAYS, PORTS AND HARBORS, AND POST AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS. MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, ON OTHER HAND, HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY MORIBUND IN RECENT YEARS. ACCORDING TO ONE VERSION MAKING ROUNDS, POWERFUL PERMSEC IN OFFICE OF PRESIDENT, GEOFFREY KARIITHI, WAS UPSET BY OMOLO OKERO'S HANDLING OF RAILWAY PROCUREMENT CONTRACTS, WHICH RESULTED IN SCANDAL LAST YEAR, AND HAS BEEN WAITING FOR MATTER TO PASS FROM PUBLIC ATTENTION BEFORE ENGINEERING REMOVAL OF OMOLO OKERO FROM THAT MINISTRY. JUST MONTHS AGO PERMSEC IN MINISTRY OF POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS WAS ALSO REPLACED BY A HIGHLY REGARDED INDIVIDUAL (SEE REFTEL), LENDING CREDENCE TO HOUSECLEANING THEORY.

4. ON OTHER HAND, WITH ELECTIONS APPROACHING AND SUCCESSION PROBLEM LOOMING FOR SOMETIME IN NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION HAS POTENTIAL FOR CONSIDERABLY GREATER SIGNIFICANCE. OMOLO OKERO, A LUO, HAS BEEN MEMBER OF VP MOI-ATTORNEY GENERAL NJONJO GROUP, AND HAS VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED EFFORTS OF OGINGA ODINGA TO REENTER LUO AND NATIONAL POLITICS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MOI AND NJONJO THOUGHT IT POLITICALLY DESIRABLE TO HAVE ONE OF THEIR MEN CONTROL MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AT THIS TIME. MUTINDA (KAMBA), FOR HIS PART, HAS CLOSE LINKS WITH SENIOR KAMBA MINISTER PAUL NGEI, AND HENCE WITH OPPOSITION TO MOI AND NJONJO.

5. MAJOR ENIGMA IS ROLE OF MUTINDA. WIDELY REGARDED AS INARTICULATE AND INEFFECTIVE, HE WILL NOW CONTROL LARGE NUMBER
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OF HIGHLY TECHNICAL SEPARATE OPERATIONS WITH ANNUALLY AWARD SIGNIFICANT CONTRACTS. BASED ON HIS PERFORMANCE AT MINISTRY OF INFORMATION FEW BELIEVE HE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL UNLESS CARRIED BY PERMSEC. OWNERS OF LOCAL MEDIA ARE DELIGHTED WITH PROSPECT OF HAVING STRONGER MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, WHO THEY HOPE WILL BE WILLING AND ABLE TO REIN IN DANIEL MBELA, THE OFTEN PROVOCATIVE PERMSEC OF THAT MINISTRY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, REORGANIZATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NAIROB01503
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780045-0389
Format: TEL
From: NAIROBI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978018/aaaaaghi.tel
Line Count: 102
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c4a2eae4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 NAIROBI 16495
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3799021
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TWO CABINET MINISTERS EXCHANGE JOBS
TAGS: PINT, KE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c4a2eae4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014